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REVIEWS

THE NATURAL METHOD OF VOICE PRODUCTION¹

In his little book on voice production Dr. Floyd S. Muckey has set down the results of thirty-six years of study and investigation of the voice mechanism, and two or three years of teaching voice production. He has stripped the subject of the verbiage commonly used by teachers of the voice, and in simple, straightforward language he has stated the facts which his long research has revealed. The fundamentals of the physics and physiology of the vocal organs, which have not been within easy reach of the unscientific teacher and student, are here stated in compact form and in phraseology which anyone who can read can understand. Some facts about voice production are presented in a way that makes them novel and striking. The illustrations are interesting and helpful. Altogether the book is entitled to a place on the shelf of every teacher and student of the voice.

The two most emphasized items in the book are (1) the importance of resonance, and (2) a method for removing interference. Experienced voice teachers will not agree with Dr. Muckey that "with full resonance, breathing is comparatively unimportant," nor will they readily accept the statement that "breath is a secondary, and not a direct cause of voice production." Physicists will doubtless insist that the breath "bows" the vocal cords just as a tuning-fork is "bowed," and that after the cords have been put into vibration the "bowing" must be continued with delicate accuracy by a perfectly controlled column of breath, a column possessing force in proportion to the amount of resonance called into play. Resonance quickly damps the vibrations, as the energy of the vibrating vocal cords is absorbed by the synchronously vibrating air of the resonance cavity. Violinists say that skilful bowing is essential, not secondary, to their art. If, as Dr. Muckey asserts, the voice is a stringed instrument, it would seem that the bowing of the strings is of prime importance. Whether one agrees with the author or not, he will find nothing in the book to warrant the abandonment of exercises for breath control.

¹ *The Natural Method of Voice Production.* By Floyd S. Muckey. New York: Scribner, 1915.

The natural method described and advocated is striking because it is directly contrary to the usual method. The removal of interference is, of course, the aim of all honest teachers of the voice. Most of them try to remove it by relaxing the muscles of the throat, tongue, palate, cheeks, etc., and letting down the lower jaw as far as it will go, thus giving the freest possible vent to the voice. They begin with the more open vowels—*ah*, *ay*, etc. The natural method begins with short, soft humming sounds made with closed jaws and lips. "Short, soft tones without interference give the most desirable and most rapid development of the vocal muscles, and therefore form the ideal exercise for voice development." From humming, the natural method passes to the vowel sounds which require the smallest opening of the jaws. "The vowel sounds which involve the least disturbance of the position . . . is *ee*. This ordinarily should be the easiest vowel sound to produce." Because *m* is made with closed lips and jaw, it is recommended as the point of departure for studying consonant sounds. "The combination of the consonant *m* and the vowel *ee* forms an excellent exercise for establishing the low position of the soft palate," in which position its muscles are completely relaxed.

All this sounds reasonable, and whether the method will do all that is claimed for it or not, it is certain to do less damage than other methods that have been widely advocated and followed. For this, if for no other reason, the natural method is a safe one to recommend, and it will doubtless be widely tried—with what success remains to be seen. If it proves to be the one right method, Dr. Muckey's work will be of inestimable value to all who would speak or sing well.

The reviewer cannot refrain from calling attention to Appendix II, which contains the "fundamental principles of voice production (formulated by the author) submitted by the National Association of Teachers of Singing to the New York State Music Teachers Convention and adopted by it in June, 1915." These principles are sound doctrine (no pun intended), and they ought to be printed on a big placard and displayed in every music studio and every schoolroom in the land. Every voice teacher and every teacher of singing ought to compel every pupil to learn them as a creed and to recite them *verbatim et literatim* until they are grained into his system. If this were done, much of the bunkum of voice teaching would disappear.

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